

# Consumer Alert: Commissioner Stewart Encourages Delawareans to Prepare for Hurricane Sandy

**Dover – October 26, 2012** – As Delaware braces for Hurricane Sandy to arrive next week, Insurance Commissioner Karen Weldin Stewart encourages Delawareans to make preparations before the storm hits. Now is the time to take several simple steps that could make filing a claim after the storm easier. The Delaware Department of Insurance offers these tips to help protect your family and your investments:

## **It's Not Too Late to Create a Home Inventory**

- To make the claims process easier, it's imperative to have a complete list of the belongings in your home. An inventory should include all of the vital information about your belongings (brand name, price, date of purchase, model, serial number and receipts) and should be accompanied by photos of the items. There are several simple ways to start building a home inventory. You can download a home inventory spreadsheet that will help get you started. If you are using an electronic or paper spreadsheet, remember to take pictures of your belongings, and save them in the same place as the home inventory.
- Or you can download the free Home Inventory app for iPhone or the Android version. The app will guide you through capturing images, descriptions, bar codes and serial numbers, and then storing them electronically for safekeeping. The app even creates a back-up file for e-mail sharing. This app is available on our website at [www.delawareinsurance.gov](http://www.delawareinsurance.gov)
- Talk with your agent or company to make sure your homeowners

or renter's policy is adequate to cover your new investments.

- If you don't have time to create a comprehensive list of the items in your home, then quickly videotape and/or photograph every room. The more detail you include, the easier it will be for your insurance company to evaluate your loss. When making your list, make sure to open drawers and closets, and don't forget to take stock of what's in your garage and storage buildings.
- Once you have made your inventory, or taken photographs of your home, e-mail the information to family or friends living out of the hurricane threat or your insurance agent.

### **Collect Your Insurance Information**

- Store copies of your insurance policies with your home inventory. Make sure to have a copy of your policy declarations page listing all of your coverages, as well as your insurance cards.
- It's also important to have 24-hour contact details for your insurance agent and insurance company. Make a list that includes your policy numbers, your insurance company and insurance agent's phone numbers, website addresses and mailing addresses. Also, check to see if the company or your agent has set up an emergency information hotline. It is a good idea to store this information, and your home inventory, in a waterproof, fireproof box or safe. If you evacuate your home, don't forget to take this information with you.
- Before a storm hits, review your insurance policies. Make sure you know what is and is not covered. If you have questions, contact your insurance agent or company.
- **NOTE!** Flood damage is NOT covered by a standard homeowners or renter's insurance policy. If you have a separate flood insurance policy, remember to include a copy of the policy and the contact details for the insurance company on your list. Be

aware that there is a 30-day waiting period before a flood insurance policy is effective. For additional information on flood insurance and knowing your flood risk, please see Consumer Alert 2012-1, or you may contact your insurance agent, or the National Flood Insurance Program at 1.800.638.6620, or visit [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov).

### **Prepare for the Worst**

- There are steps you can take to help mitigate some of the damage caused by a hurricane or tropical storm. If your home is equipped with storm shutters, make sure you can quickly put them in place. Clear your yard of debris that could become projectiles in high winds and trim dead or overhanging branches from trees surrounding your home. It's also a good time to make a quick review of your home to make sure the roof sheathing is properly secured, that end gables are securely fastened to the roof, and that doors and garage doors are latched properly.
- For personal safety, identify the nearest storm shelter and have an evacuation plan for your family. Also, make sure you have hurricane survival supplies including: bottled water, a first aid kit, flashlights, a battery-operated radio, at least three days of non-perishable food items, blankets, clothing, prescription drugs, eyeglasses, personal hygiene supplies and enough cash for at least three days.
- If you are forced to evacuate your home, turn off all utilities and disconnect appliances to reduce the chance of additional damage and electrical shock when utilities are restored.
- For more information about how to prepare your family and home for the threat of tropical storms or hurricanes, visit the American Red Cross' or download their Hurricane Safety Checklist at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

### **After the Storm**

- The days following a natural disaster can be confusing and stressful, but it is important that you focus on filing your insurance claim(s) as quickly as possible to help protect your financial future.
- The first step to getting your home restored is to contact your insurance company and/or agent with your policy number and other relevant information. Be aware that your policy might require that you make this notification within a certain time frame.
- Take photographs/video of the damage before clean-up or repairs. After you've documented the damage, make repairs necessary to prevent further damage to your property (cover broken windows, leaking roofs and damaged walls). DO NOT have permanent repairs made until your insurance company has inspected the property and you have reached an agreement on the cost of repairs. Be prepared to provide the claims adjuster with records of any improvements you made prior to the damage. Save all receipts, including those from the temporary repairs.
- If your home is damaged to the extent that you cannot live there, ask your insurance company or insurance agent if you have coverage for additional living expenses.
- Cooperate fully with the insurance company. Ask what documents, forms and data you will need to file the claim. Keep a diary of all conversations you have with the insurance company and your insurance agent, including names, times and dates of the calls or visits and contact details.
- Be certain to give your insurance company all the information they need. Incorrect or incomplete information may cause a delay in processing your claim.
- If the first offer made by the insurance company does not meet your expectations, be prepared to negotiate. If there is a disagreement about the claim, ask the company for the

specific language in the policy in question and determine why you and the company interpret your policy differently. If you believe you are being treated unfairly, or if the delay is unreasonable, contact the Delaware Department of Insurance at 1-800-282-8611 (in-state).

- Even after settling your claim, if you think of items that were not in your initial loss list, contact your insurance company. Unless the company has paid the entire limit for the coverage of those types of items, it is possible the company will make an additional payment.

### **Protect Yourself From Home Repair Fraud**

- Home repair fraud increases exponentially following a major storm. Protect your investment by getting more than one bid from contractors and requesting at least three references.
- Do not pay a contractor the full amount up front or sign over your insurance settlement payment. A contractor should expect to be paid a percentage when the contract is signed and the remainder when the work is completed.
- If the contractor finds hidden damage that was not discovered in the original assessment by the adjuster, contact your insurance company to resolve the difference. For any disagreements that cannot be resolved, contact your state insurance department about your recourse.

These storm tips, as well as more information about homeowners insurance, the home inventory smartphone app and an online complaint form, are available on the Delaware Department of Insurance website at [www.delawareinsurance.gov](http://www.delawareinsurance.gov). Call the Department of Insurance at 1-800-282-8611 (in-state) with any questions you have about insurance coverage or if you have any problems with your insurance companies.